

The Default of Octavia Caesar

A Man From Longeddy Tale.

By MAURICE MORRIS.

"SPEAKIN' about hawgs," said the man from Longeddy.

Old man Ketchum, who was lifting the wire cheese cover, dropped it back in place.

"Speakin' about hawgs, o' course my favorite breed is the Poland Chiny, and, as most folks know, I've had pretty good luck with 'em."

"Huh," said old man Ketchum.

"I don't mean only by contrast," said the man from Longeddy. "Course, if you compared the results I got from that bred gilt I bought off Obed Miles two year ago with what some other folks didn't get off one they bought at the very same time, 'twould make that gilt o' mine look like a champeen. O' course she ain't that. But she is reg'lar as the clock, and I can count on a litter of eight twicet a year as a pretty sure thing."

"Still and all, I'd have to admit, if you was to press me—"

"Ain't nobody doin' any pushin', fur as I can see," said old man Ketchum.

"That the greatest hawg ever I knowed for breedin' and hawg sense combined wasn't a Poland Chiny at all, but a Duroc. Great big dark red creatur she was, weighin' sompthing like three fifty, an' if it hadn't been for a cur'us thing that happened to her I believe that sow—but there, I'm gettin' ahead of my story."

"Too bad it ain't the tail," said old man Ketchum.

"Cherry Ripe, we used to call her, 'count of her color," said the man from Longeddy, "but her reg'lar name was Octavia Caesar, and there ain't no doubt she was a pedigreed animile, though Beriah Seeser didn't have nothing to show for it. Beriah Seeser was an animile trainer. 'Caesar the Supreme' he was called when he was with Rooney & Rombold's tent show, and his educated pig act was the best thing in it. I allays thought. When Luke Niggle married one of the Horton girls, Beriah married the other, retired from public life and settled down on a farm next to the Horton place. Wonderful way with animiles, Beriah had. He was a little man one of the soft spoken, cajolin' kind, and when he got whispering in the ear of a horse or a dog or a pig there wasn't nothing they wouldn't do for him, seemed like a'most. 'Course he couldn't train lions and such by his method, and he never tried."

"Juh say lyin's or lions?" said old man Ketchum.

"When Beriah fust come to Ulster county he brought his entire pig act with him, but the only two I seem to remember was this Duroc sow and a gaunt slabsided razor back. He didn't last long but he cert'nly started a rucus while he was there. He was the cause of the feud between Beriah and Ermentrout Finch, was Holler Ground."

Pig Runs Loose.

"Holler Ground?" said Tunk Whalley.

"Name of the big slabsided hog; back on him like a rainbow in shape, full o' saw teeth and sharp's a razor," said the man from Longeddy. "Hadden't been settled more'n a week when he bruck out one night, sawed right through the side of his pen, got into a field of millet belonging to Ermentrout Finch that was only just beginnin' to head up, and next mornin' that millet was a sight to see—mowed slick's a whistle from one end of the field to the other and lyin' in pretty even swaths, too—what Holler Ground hadn't et, that is. Erm raised Cain, o' course, and collected fifty dollars damages, and Beriah never forgave him. He allays said that pen had been sawed by sompthing else than a hawg's back. So that was the end of Holler Ground."

"Well, I'm glad that's all, and it sounded pretty holler to me," said old man Ketchum.

"Which brings me," said the man from Longeddy, "to what I was goin' to say when the subject of hawgs was opened up by certain acts which is makin' the cheese business a mighty unprofitable one for Newt here, and that is that of all the hawgs I've ever saw, cheese eatin' or not, this Octavia Caesar was the brightest. Why, what that animile could do in the way of tricks you wouldn't believe."

"Kerrect," said old man Ketchum.

"Jump through a hoop of fire, shoot off a gun, nuss out of a bottle, or pick out any card in the pack, she could. But her greatest pofformance was in 'rithmetic. She was 'bout as good as they come, man

or woman, at that, and I ain't barrin' anybody either who gets reg'lar practice every month addin' up the long bill Newt sends him."

"Offentimes when I'd go over to Beriah's, I'd persuade him to put that Duroc sow through her paces, but specially her 'rithmetic. Wasn't any sum in addition or subtraction she couldn't do—up to ten, that is. Ten seemed to be the limit. Kind of fascinatin' to watch her, it was, bein' as she did it all with small round pebbles or marbles. She'd be standin' there lookin' at

"It was all of a flash the great idee fust come to Beriah," said the man from Longeddy. "I happened to be over at his place where the sow was playin' round with her last family o' little pigs and spillin' her pebbles on the ground, when I felt Beriah clutch my arm and found him starin' at me. 'Loosh,' he says, 'how many countin' pebbles has that sow got?' Why, ten, o' course, Beriah, I says. 'And how many pigs does she allays farrer,' he says. 'Ten,' I says. 'You see the connection, don't you, Loosh,' he says."



"And Beriah was sayin', 'And here is the fifty of Caesar the Supreme.'"

had a special corner fenced off for this Duroc sow I'm tellin' about, and, 'Octavia,' he says, speakin' careful like, 'how many in six and six?' and just as careful, that sow spills twelve pebbles on the barn floor. Well—"

"Did she farrer that spring?" said Lufe Upshaw.

"Twelve fine little red fellers in the middle o' April," said the man from Longeddy.

"Well, all that spring and summer Beriah neglected his farm work and spent his time teachin' higher mathematics to that sow. In the fall she had fourteen pebbles in her mouth; she could count up to fourteen, and blest if she didn't have a litter of fourteen pigs in October."

Old man Ketchum drew a long breath and his hand started toward the cheese cover, but I moved it back a little and he didn't speak.

Broke the Record.

"In the follerin' spring," said the man from Longeddy, "Octavia was chewin' on sixteen pebbles and her April litter o' sixteen bruck the re-cord in that part o' the county."

"Well, sirs, by that time this Duroc sow was a pretty celebrated animile, as you may well believe, and as for Beriah, there wasn't no holdin' him. Got to callin' himself Caesar the Supreme ag'in and tellin' everybody what he was goin' to do with Octavia 'fore he got through. 'Course it started considerable talk, especially among the church people. Elder Uriah Johnson happened along one day, I remember, and laid him out. 'Beriah Seeser,' says the elder, 'you are a presumptuous and sinful man attemptin' to control and direct forces and laws of which you wot not of,' he says, 'and tribulation and trial will be your portion,' he says. But Beriah was past payin' heed then to the elder or anybody else. Finally, one Saturday evenin' at Tomashek's tavern Beriah made his bet with Ermentrout Finch. I don't know how it started, because I wasn't there, but when I happened along—"

"Huh," said old man Ketchum.

"Ermentrout Finch was sayin', 'It's a bet. There's my fifty'; and Beriah was sayin', 'And here is the fifty of Caesar the Supreme—which if you win will make a hundred dollars you got o' mine,' says Beriah, alludin' to the fifty dollars damages for the millet field, 'which you won't,' he says; 'and Lucius Finney,' he says, turnin' to me, 'shall hold the stakes.' 'Suits me,' said Ermentrout, with one o' his grins. 'Loosh it is,' he says."

"What was the bet?" said Tunk Whalley.

"Beriah bet Octavia would have a litter of twenty pigs 'that comin' October, and Erm bet she wouldn't," said the man from Longeddy.

"Well, Beriah started in with that sow to raise her from sixteen to eighteen in mental 'rithmetic with the help o' them stone counters. Seemed to get harder and harder to teach her, the higher the figger got, but along in June he told me he had succeeded. Then he starts in workin' like mad with her to raise her from eighteen to twenty. Seemed like he was at her day and night, and you couldn't help feelin' kinder sorry for Octavia."

"Erm Finch insisted on inspectin' her from time to time to see that everything was fair, as he said. I couldn't see no sense in that, and it was pretty inconvenient for me at times, as he said it had to be done allays in the presence of the stakeholder, but he insisted on his rights and I had to give in. Last inspection he made was early in October when Octavia was pretty clust to her time. She was lyin' in the barn half asleep, I remember, and Erm had kinder lingered behind when Beriah and I got to the door, and Octavia seemed to kind o' rouse up just afore Erm joined us. 'Think you're goin' to win, do you?' he says to Beriah. 'No, I don't,' says Beriah. 'I don't think I know I am.' He had already told me private that Octavia had been handlin', or rather mouthin', the twenty counters for several weeks. 'Mebbe so, mebbe so,' says Ermentrout, 'but you want to remember that there's many a slip betwixt the pebbles and the lip,' he says, grinnin' some."

"Next mornin' Ermentrout Finch came along and routed me out o' bed right after sun up. 'I want to make just one final

Beriah out of her little eyes, and her jaw kind o' goin' from side to side like a cow when it's chewin' its cud, and Beriah'd say, 'Octavia,' he'd say, 'I want you should tell me how much two added to three makes,' and plop, out 'ud drop two marbles from Octavia's mouth and three more, with just a little bit of a hitch in between. Or he might ask how much was five and five, and out'd come the whole set in batches of five. But soon as Octavia'd spill 'em, she'd grab 'em up again. 'Bout the only time them marbles was out of her mouth for long was grub time. All smooth and white the whole ten was, from the chewin' she'd give to 'em in the course of years."

"How about when you wanted to make her subtract?" Lufe Upshaw asked.

"Well, you might think at first there wasn't no difference from her addin'," said the man from Longeddy. "Say it was to take three from five, you'd see the marbles begin to spill out, then down'd go her snout and you'd see two marbles there on the ground. If you watched clost you'd see, though, that what she did was to spill out five and then grab three up ag'in before you could wink. Pretty cute trick, Cherry Ripe was, or Octavia, to stick to her professional name."

"Cute ain't no name for it," said old man Ketchum.

"After I'd got well acquainted with Beriah," said the man from Longeddy, "I urged him to breed Octavia, and finally I persuaded him to mate her with a pedigreed boar they was up in Greene county. Wasn't no use, as I see it, not to try to perpetuate them valleybe traits, and that fall she had ten fine pigs, which Beriah sold at good prices. Well, to make a long story short—"

"Huh," said old man Ketchum.

"Every spring and fall after that, Octavia'd have a litter of ten, but none of 'em didn't seem to have their mother's mathematical ability."

"Guess the trouble was the owners none of 'em didn't have no grabbin' ability," said old man Ketchum.

"Can't say I do," says L. "Why," he says, 'as sure as you're born, the number of them pebbles is what controls the number in each o' her litters o' pigs. She's a highly educated animile, Octavia is, and her brain influences her bodily functions—in a unconscious way, o' course,' he says. 'You don't mean that, Beriah,' I says. 'I do mean it,' he says. 'Them pebbles is holdin' down the number o' her pigs and I'm going to prove it,' he says."

"Well, what does Beriah do when Octavia's farrowin' time come along that fall but take all o' her pebbles away from her."

"And what was the result?" said Lufe Upshaw.

"Wasn't no result," said the man from Longeddy. "Sow was barren for the first time. I went over to Beriah's when I heard about it, thinkin' to find him all broken up over the failure. But he wasn't, not a bit of it. Awful obstinate, Beriah was, for all he was so soft spoken. 'Well, Beriah,' I says, 'you see you were all wrong.' 'Wrong!' he says. 'Wrong!' I was right, and this proves it.' 'Proves it?' says L. 'Yes,' says he. 'Ten pebbles, ten pigs,' he says, 'no pebbles, no pigs. I went the wrong way about it to git what I was after. I see that now,' he says. 'And what are you after?' I says. 'I'm a—goin', he says, 'to have the biggest litter of pigs that was ever farrowed in Ulster county. I'm a—goin', he says, noddin' his head and speakin' slow, 'before I git through, I'm a—goin' to have the biggest litter o' pigs that ever was, anywhere.'"

"All that fall and winter Beriah devoted himself to teachin' Octavia advanced 'rithmetic. It seems the scientists say a animile can't count into double figgers, but Beriah said he'd proved 'em wrong once and would again. Said it stood to reason he knowed more about that one partickler sow than the most educated pigologist that ever lived, and he'd bet his farm he could carry Octavia from ten up to twelve."

"And did he do it?" said Tunk Whalley.

"Early in the spring," said the man from Longeddy, "first of March 'twas, Beriah led me out to his barn where he

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